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ABSTRACT

The Urban Initiative of the New Jersey Department of Education commits large numbers of its staff to a variety of efforts to improve schooling in the State's urban areas. It also represents an effort to develop a programmatic response that is rooted in research to the problems of urban education. In broad outline, the initiative is a comprehensive, long-term effort with two major components: a broad based assistance program for all 52 urban districts in the State, and a concentrated effort (Operation School Renewal) to improve the quality of education in three urban school districts and then expand to include additional districts. Both components complement New Jersey's new approach to monitoring the educational programs of local school districts. A major strategy of the Urban Initiative involves identifying and informing urban educators of effective urban school programs in New Jersey and other States. Effective school research played a fundamental role in the development of the Urban Initiative. Most significantly, it provided approaches (1) to address the low graduation rates of compensatory and bilingual students; (2) to develop sound disciplinary practices, policies, and educational alternatives for disruptive students; and (3) to increase the effectiveness of principals in participating schools. Research on implementation of innovation, which was also crucial, provided (1) the idea of using staff members as "external assistants" who help districts identify problems, find resources, and support implementation procedures; (2) an awareness of the importance of local commitment and the form it should take; and (3) plans for implementation. (KH)

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Melding of Research on Knowledge - Based School Improvement & Effective Schools in the Development of a Statewide Urban Schools Initiative

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New Jersey's Urban Initiative will be a major thrust of the work of the Department of Education for at least the next three years. It commits significant numbers of staff to a variety of efforts to improve schooling in New Jersey's urban areas. It also represents an effort to develop a programmatic response that is rooted in research to the problems of urban education.

Because Harriet Doss Willis, Assistant Commissioner of General Academic Education in the NJ SEA, discussed the details of the initiative, I will confine myself to its broad outlines. Following that overview, I will indicate the areas in which the Effective Schools Research was influential and how the research on knowledge-based school improvement influenced the proposed process. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the use of research in the development of state programs.

NEW JERSEY'S URBAN INITIATIVE

Governor Kean indicated in his state-of-the-state message to the legislature, "Urban education deserves our attention. And, it will get it." The New Jersey State Department of Education proposes to join with urban educators and communities in launching a campaign to improve inner city schools. From the outset, it must be recognized that no single solution, program or project can substantially alleviate all of the problems associated with urban education.

Therefore, New Jersey has designed a comprehensive, long-term effort which has two major components:

1. A broad-based assistance program for all 52 urban districts in the state that will focus on nine critical educational issues; and

2. A concentrated effort (Operation School Renewal) to improve the quality of education in three urban school districts initially and then expand to include additional districts as experience and resources permit.

Both the broad based program and the concentrated effort will complement the state's new approach to monitoring the educational programs of local school districts. Although applicable to all New Jersey districts, the monitoring process will be especially useful to high need urban districts, which initially may be unable to meet state certification standards. Monitoring yields solid data and emphasizes local accountability for educational

improvement. Therefore, the monitoring process will facilitate urban district renewal by helping the district and the state to focus on local needs. The broad based and concentrated components of the initiative represent the department's commitment to work with urban communities to resolve local educational problems.

A major strategy of the urban initiative involves identifying and informing urban educators of effective programs being conducted by urban schools in New Jersey and in other states. Department personnel will research these programs and will develop dissemination and training materials related to them. Through the regional curriculum services units and a special School Renewal Team, urban districts and schools will receive assistance in adapting these practices, where appropriate, to meet local needs.

The two bodies of research of concern in this paper -- the effective schools research and the research on implementation of innovation -- each played a distinct role in the development of the Urban Initiative. The next two sections analyze those roles.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Although explicit reference to the effective schools research occurs only twice within the Initiative paper, many of the issues in the broad-based assistance program and the objectives in the concentrated initiative (Operation School Renewal) have clearly been influenced by that body of knowledge. Indeed one could argue that the very existence of the Urban

Initiative is a tribute to the existence of that research and of programs designed to implement it in other cities and states. It is also a tribute to the growing bodies of research on instructional procedures appropriate for a variety of curricular areas.

To indicate the role of research on effective schools and effective instruction, I will discuss two issues in the broad-based initiative and one in the concentrated effort.

Enabling Compensatory & Bilingual Secondary Students to Fulfill High School Graduation Requirements: Two approaches are proposed to address the low graduation rates of compensatory education/bilingual students. The first involves dissemination and use of an effective school-based model developed by Research for Better Schools (RBS). Achievement Directed Leadership provides training in methods of (1) monitoring and increasing student engaged time; (2) aligning the curriculum; (3) relating teacher supervision to district basic skills objectives; and (4) increasing the principal's focus on instruction. Already in place, with assistance from RBS and Department staff, in three New Jersey school districts, ADL will be offered in the broad based initiative to additional districts with large numbers of compensatory education students. ADL applies to elementary as well as secondary schools and so is an attempt to build students skills from the start of their school experience.

The second approach, identifying and disseminating exemplary approaches to bilingual and compensatory education, will be guided by existing research on effective managerial and instructional strategies. The Department has

already begun the identification process. The documentation effort will start with looking for the presence of those school and classroom behaviors already demonstrated as related to effectiveness.

Developing Sound Disciplinary Practices, Policies, and Educational Alternatives for Disruptive Students: The existence of this issue within the broad-based approach is a response to political as well as educational concerns. Nonetheless, the way it is cast is congruent with the effective schools research base. First, the underlying idea as to use concerns for discipline as a way to improve school climate and begin a process of sharing among members of the school community. Second, one part of the approach focuses on successful classroom management of students because when students are involved in learning, there are fewer opportunities or incentives for disruption. Third, the approach accepts that school organizational factors and adult behaviors contribute to disruption and provides a framework for analysis of those behaviors and factors. Finally, the alternative programs for the disruptive students turn out to be extraordinary exemplar of effective schools. We looked for evidence of effectiveness -- in terms of reduced disruption, reduced drop-out rates, increased achievement -- in those schools. After identifying the successes, we found that their qualities are magnifications of effective schools qualities. Thus, we see an opportunity for using the information on alternate schools to improve mainstream schools.

Concentrated (Operation School Renewal): To Increase the Effectiveness of Building Principals in Participating Schools: "The principal as instructional leader" is one of the rallying cries of the effective schools'

movement. And yet, we all know that very few principals have the knowledge or skill to be instructional leaders. To be such a leader requires understanding of instructional issues and high levels of managerial skills. Until recently, instructional knowledge was not a criterion for principal selection nor was it emphasized in administrator training. The response in the Concentrated Initiative is two fold -- to use appropriate corporate management programs for improving managerial skills and to ensure that principals participate in the training that accompanies the curriculum and instructional models selected for use in the schools.

Principals, like teachers, lead lives that are at once highly interactive and extraordinarily isolated. They receive little analysis of their daily performance and little help in improving it. As a response to these problems, Operation School Renewal will bring together principals from the participating schools to formal sessions to study and to discuss the nature and function of educational leadership. Emphasis will be upon the practical as well as the theoretical with a particular focus on successful programs in urban settings. Thus, the effective schools research can be studied, adapted and applied by principals to their individual buildings.

The three areas discussed above indicate the influence of research about school and classroom effectiveness on the Urban Initiative. In the next section I will demonstrate how the process embedded in the Initiative reflects the implementation research.

IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

The key approach to schools improvement in the Urban Initiative is adoption and implementation of exemplary programs or research findings. Further, many of the findings of studies of federal and state improvement efforts are woven into the Initiative. However, as with the effective schools research, one is hard pressed to find the code words/jargon of dissemination/utilization practitioners and researchers in the paper. The paper reflects an instrumental use of concepts. The three concepts to be discussed are: external assistants (resource finders and implementation supporters); local commitment; and planning for implementation.

External Assistants: The initiative is flooded with external assistants -- also known as linkers. For each of the issues addressed in the broad-based approach, Department staff provides three types of assistance; in Operation School Renewal, the School Renewal Teams serve many assistance roles.

Within the broad-based approach, Department staff help districts identify problems. Through existing structures, urban districts will be encouraged to participate in those programs that seem to address their needs most directly. Department staff also serve as resource finders, helping participants to connect with the most relevant research or exemplary programs. Finally, the Department will broker either outside resources or resources within the Department itself.

The School Renewal Team represents an on-going source of external assistance. The Team as a whole will work closely with districts -- and, perhaps, school level-teams. Analysis of problems and identification of useful research and programs are built into the process. The School Renewal Team will identify resources from a variety of places -- research, practice, industry, etc. -- and create the links between them and the district. Finally, and most important, the members of the School Renewal Team also provide assistance in imlementation. It is, therefore, critical that the members of the School Renewal Team be able to assess when outside help is needed or when it is better to push for self-reliance. The general mode, of course, will be collaborative problem solving.

Local commitment: The entire initiative embodies voluntarism. Within the broad-based approach the only degree of commitment explicitly required is signing up and showing up. Implicitly, however, more is needed because each issue contains within it some rather difficult outcome measures.

It is within Operation School Renewal that local commitment is most required. A significant factor in the selection process will be the district's written commitment to:

1. participate fully in the project for a minimum of three years;

2. provide a full-time position for a three-year period to support the project in that district. (The person appointed to that position is considered a member of the School Renewal Team and as such must be approved annually by the Assistant Commissioner of Education Programs.)

3. provide necessary space for Department of Education staff and consultants for specified periods of time;

4. provide selected Department of Education staff and consultants for specified periods of time;

5. provide a specially selected School Renewal Team access to schools, to students and to teachers over an extended time;

6. guarantee support for the project by the school board, district superintendent and the particular principals involved;

7. guarantee that board members, administrators, and teachers fully support their pupil discipline policy. [No district will be considered for participation that does not have a code of conduct and a formal puil discipline policy.]

8. allow documentation and dissemination of the process and of the measurable results in each school involved.

Finally, all three districts chosen must want to participate. The school board president and the superintendent must be willing to sign a contractual agreement specifying the priority of the initiative in district policy and operation during the three year time span.

Planning for implementation: Much current research on school improvement emphasizes the important of planning for program implementation if the program is to remain when the funding -- or state presence -- leaves. The concentrated initiative reflects this research.

The three districts will be chosen by June. The summer is devoted to preliminary planning by the participating districts and the School Renewal Team. From September to December, "intensive collaborative planning" occurs, with January devoted to "final preparation for implementation," and implementation beginning in February, 1985.

Given the scope of the program, that amount of planning for implementation is not too long -- and, indeed, may, in some cases, be too short. Candor leads me to say that the timeline only in part exists because of an understanding of the research on implementation. A more pragmatic reason is that local budgets are submitted in January. The planning period will be used to influence district budget allocations -- for staff development, materials, etc. -- for the following year. Although pragmatism determines the dates, having district budgets reflect the innovations planned under the initiative is, in fact, a good way to help ensure implementation.

CONCLUSION

It would be naive to suggest that the research has driven this program. Specific objectives represent a response to perceived or real problems in the urban schools. For example, the focus on alternative schools for disruptive youth clearly represents an answer to the image of "chaos in the classroom," and the concern for reading, math, and writing results from the low scores in the areas on the New Jersey state tests. New Jersey has an "education Governor," an activist Commissioner, and a funding process that is not kind to urban schools. The Urban Initiative results as much from these forces as from any research. Nonetheless, those of us who work in public bureaucracies have learned that purity of cause is less an issue than soundness of response. And the approach within the Urban Initiative reflects the research.

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